

Dear Congressman,

HB 505 is before you, a bill that is hugely needed in Montana. The law on assisted suicide is confused, which is allowing suicide proponents to claim that assisted suicide is already legal and putting our elders, me, my family, etc. at risk.

I attended the recent Senate hearing on this issue where it was stated that a group of seven attorneys was not able to agree on what Baxter concluded. Baxter gave a physician a POSSIBLE defense if someone levied criminal charges against him. Therefore, you must pass HB 505 to put to rest the confusion that Baxter creates.

Additionally, we need a bill that will protect the citizens of Montana from becoming victims of elder abuse, abuse of the vulnerable (i.e. handicapped, infirmed of any age), or ultimately for those that family, friends, or government decide are no longer worthy of life or of receiving medical care. This has already been the case in Oregon where a Medicaid patient was denied further cancer treatment but payment would be made for a lethal dose.

Physicians know that patients in a fragile condition due to an extended illness, pain, or depression are often not able to make cogent decisions. Furthermore, the power of suggestion, feelings of being a burden, or coercion may underlie one making a decision for assisted suicide. Obviously, this would work against the well-being of the patient. We do not encourage the termination of life for our wounded veterans who are severely maimed or injured on the battlefield. It would be un-American to suggest such a thing. Rather we promote medical care, counseling, and rehabilitation.

The proponents, the former Hemlock Society, are extremely aggressive. I am a retired doctor but several of my practicing colleagues received a letter from the proponents encouraging them to start encouraging their patients to kill themselves and/or falsely claiming that assisted suicide is legal. The only reason that assisted suicide is not already legal in Montana is because a small citizens group has been willing to stand up to this outside invader.

I urge our legislature to do its job. Last year the Montana Medical Examiner Board adopted "Position Statement No. 20" implying that assisted suicide is "already legal. "If nothing is done to clarify the law, there could easily be defacto or actual legalization in Montana before the next legislative session. If this occurs, Montana will experience the negative consequences described above, including new paths of elder abuse, trauma and fear.

As in Oregon, there could be steerage to suicide by health plans. As in Oregon, there could be a significantly increasing suicide rate. [Montana is already the third highest in the nation.] As in Washington State, there could soon be the suggestion of direct euthanasia for non-terminal people; there could be the suggestion of involuntary euthanasia for people unable to afford their own care.

This is not scare mongering, but the real life of legal assisted suicide in Oregon and Washington. Both Oregon's and Washington's laws are the result of ballot initiatives. Although this measure has been brought before legislative bodies over 100 times, it has never been enacted into law through that means. Don't let Montana be the first! Montana has the chance to stop it now. Vote yes on HB 505.

Sincerely,

Dr. David W. Hafer
Dayton, Mt